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AUTHOR Prater, Doris: Padia, William
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ABSTRACT

To help school districts comply with basic skills legislation, the California State Department of Education developed sample writing exercises and scoring guides. The exercises were modeled after Kinneavy's three categories of discourse: expressive--writer oriented; explanatory--subject oriented; and persuasive--audience oriented. The minimum prompt gave directions to students about the purpose and audience for their essay. A four-point holistic scoring guide was developed: four evaluation criteria were associated with each point. An analytic scoring guide was also developed to rate content (ideas, organization) and the mechanics of syntax, usage, punctuation, capitalization and spelling. Criteria established for both guides were similar. To measure the reliability of the scoring guides, elementary teachers were trained to score 600 essays by students, grades four and six. Each essay received a holistic score from two independent scorers, as well. Correlation coefficients between the holistic and total analytic scores for each discourse category were strong. (CP)

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DEVELOPING PARALLEL HOLISTIC AND ANALYTIC SCORING GUIDES FOR ASSESSING ELEMENTARY WRITING SAMPLES*

by

Doris Prater
University of Houston
Clear Lake City 77058

William Padia
California State Department of
Education

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DEVELOPING PARALLEL HOLISTIC AND ANALYTIC SCORING GUIDES FOR ASSESSING ELEMENTARY WRITING SAMPLES

Overview

The recent trend to measure minimum competency in basic skill areas has focused attention on modes of assessment in these areas. School districts are increasingly concerned with measuring application levels of performance. The need to determine if students can function effectively in society has prompted efforts to make assessment more reflective of the skills required in the adult world. The assessment of writing by the use of writing samples has become particularly appealing. Early problems with reliability have been minimized by the establishment of strict scoring criteria and by intensive training of readers. The validity of the assessment process seems to offset substantially any misgivings about scoring consistency.

In California, Assembly Bill 3408 was enacted in September, 1976, requiring secondary schools to adopt local standards of proficiency in basic skill areas of reading comprehension,writing, and computation. AB65, enacted in September, 1977, extended the requirements to include adoption of elementary proficiency standards as well. AB 65 is a comprehensive school support and improvement measure which placed proficiency standards into a legal framework of financial support for meaningful school

improvement K-12. AB65 requires school districts to assess periodically pupil proficiency in the basic skill areas in grades four through eleven. (California State Department of Education, 1977)

The Department of Education in California is responsible for providing technical assistance to local school districts as they implement the legislation. Among the materials provided by the Department are Sample Assessment Exercises Manual, Grades 4-6, and Sample Assessment Exercises Manual, Grades 7-11. These volumes contain a wide range of test items with accompanying item specifications and field test performance data. Separate sections in each publication were developed to provide assistance for assessing writing by the use of writing samples. Scoring guides were developed and field tested. This paper will focus specifically on the development and validation of the elementary scoring guides. This procedure was particularly interesting because both holistic and analytic scoring guides were developed across three modes of discourse. The procedure involved the selection of type of writing to be measured, construction of the prompt, development of the scoring guide, and validation of the guides using 600 student essays.

Selecting the Type of Writing to Be Measured

An advisory group of classroom teachers, university teachers, and representatives from Southwest Regional

Laboratories (SWRL), the Writing Project at UCLA's Center for the Study of Evaluation and the Department of Education met to discuss the types of writing appropriate to measure at the elementary level. It was determined that since performance across modes of discourse would likely vary, scoring guides would be constructed to assess several types of writing. Many excellent models are available for categorizing types of writing. For our purposes, the group decided to adopt Kinneavy's categories of Expressive Discourse (Writer oriented), Explanatory Discourse (Subject oriented), and Persuasive Discourse (Audience oriented). (Kinneavy, 1971)

Since alternate forms of assessment devices are a necessity, the advisory group was interested in observing variance in student performance across modes.

Constructing the Writing Prompts

A prompt may be defined as the directions to a writer to elicit a piece of writing. The prompt frames the basic writing task. Pictures are sometimes included at elementary level. If the writing produced is to be used for evaluative purposes, the prompts must be standardized in the same way as test directions for other types of assessment. Since composition relies on the generation of ideas, it is particularly important that any external motivation for writing that is given to students be contained in the prompt. In this way, motivation for writing is provided equally for all examinees.

Prompts may vary in length and content. For example, a prompt may be simply a title or topic ("My School"). This is quite a different prompt from one in which specific content suggestions are made (e.g., Write about your school. Tell about your friends, your teacher, the playground.) A legitimate concern in designing prompts for younger students, however, is that the student produce enough writing to allow for responsible appraisal. The ideal prompt should promote the desired type of writing in sufficient amount for assessment, yet stop short of prescribing content and organization. The purpose of the prompt is, after all, to foster the student's best efforts in writing. (See Appendix for prompts developed for SAEM.)

As a minimum, it is suggested that the prompt include a purpose for the writing (What is the writing for?) and specify an audience (Who is the writing for?). In addition, prompts must be free of ethnic and sex bias. A cultural bias review panel is useful in reviewing both open and closed response type items. Finally, try the prompts out on a sample of students to see if they function as intended.

Developing Scoring Guides

The scoring guide provides the criteria for scoring the essay. Generally, assessment of writing is accomplished in one of two ways: a paper is read in its entirety as a whole piece of writing or it can be read for certain elements of writing, each element receiving a separate score.

Although there is some disagreement as to terms used in classifying types of guides, for the purposes of this paper, the first category is referred to as holistic and the second as analytic.

Holistic

In some holistic guides the overall score is arrived at by referencing each paper to the other papers being graded without regard to any external criteria. The set of papers being read defines the range and papers are assigned to score intervals on their relative merits. If a four point scale is used the best papers (generally 10-20%) of the set are "4's", the worst (10-20%) are "1's" and the remainder are either "2's" or "3's". The single score obtained is useful an an initial screening. However, the single score obtained gives few clues as to specific strengths and weeknesses of the paper unless scorer comments are added. (This is very time consuming and negates the advantage holistic scoring has of being rapidly accomplished.)

In developing holistic scoring guides for SAEM, the Department went a step beyond merely using "anchor" papers to define each point on the scale. Specific criteria were also established to assist readers in assigning the score to the paper. The criteria used are generally stated and the emphasis is still on the paper as a whole rather than its separate parts.

An holistic scoring guide was constructed for each type of writing measured. (See Appendix.) The guides for both holistic and analytic scoring are topic specific. They are designed to be used with a particular writing prompt.

Analytic

An analytic scoring guide was also developed for each writing prompt. The criteria established for the guides closely parallel the holistic scoring guide for each respective type of writing. The analytic scoring guide yields subscores in a number of categories: Ideas, Organization, Usage, Syntax, Capitalization/Punctuation, and Spelling. It is possible with this guide to weight the categories in arriving at a total analytic score. That is, "Ideas" and "Organization" may be determined to be more important in arriving at a total score than some of the more mechanical features such as "Capitalization/ Punctuation."

A combination of holistic and analytic scoring was suggested to school districts. When the entire population is initially tested, holistic scoring provides a fast, accurate first screening. Essays that are below an acceptable level can be rescored analytically to provide diagnostic information.

In developing both holistic and analytic scoring guides, familiarity with actual student essays is needed to establish realistic expectations for student writing. The guides should reflect

the knowledge and experience of teachers of composition at the appropriate grade level. Much remains uncertain about the composing process and there is no universal agreement as to what constitutes "good" writing. This makes the task of establishing strict criteria in advance impractical unless it is validated against actual student performance. Using student essays drawn from a variety of ability levels is invaluable in helping decide on key features that separate high, low, and average essays. It is also recommended that guides be tied to particular writing topics.

Validation of the Scoring Guides

One hundred students in grade four and one hundred students in grade six were asked to write on each of the three prompts within a two week period early in the school year. This resulted in a total of six hundred essays that were scored by readers. The students represented three school districts within the state selected to provide diversity in geography and SES level.

Two teams of readers were trained independently to read the essays. Participants were elementary teachers randomly assigned to receive training in either holistic or analytic scoring techniques. After being trained to criterion performance, the readers given the actual essays to read. Within each team (holistic or analytic) each

essay was read at least twice. Educational Testing Service's scoring procedures were followed. (Fowles, 1978) Discrepent scores, in which individual scores by the two readers vary two or more points (holistic) or one point on an element (analytic) were resolved by having the paper read by the Chief Reader. Thus, each paper was given an holistic score (obtained by two independent readings) and an analytic score (obtained by two independent readings).

Correlation coefficients between the holistic scores and the total analytic scores were strong. The obtained correlation coefficients for expressive, explanatory, and persuasive writing samples based on scores from the two guides were .75, .76, and .76, respectively. The single element within the analytic score showing the strongest correlation with the holistic score on the three types of writing was "Ideas" with correlations of .75, .73, and .60 for expressive, explanatory, and persuasive, respectively. The subscore for "Ideas" was the single best predictor of the holistic score.

The development of these two types of scoring guides has proven useful as readers follow the two step process described previously. By rereading borderline and deficient papers a second time using the analytic guide, specific areas of weakness can be pinpointed.

Additional information on California State Department Sample Assessment Items may be obtained by directing inquiries to:

Dr. William Padia
Office of Program Evaluation and Research
California State Department of Education
721 Capitol Mall Plaza
Sacramento, California 95814

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Fowles, Mary E., Basic Skills Assessment: Manual for Scoring the Writing Sample. Princeton, N. J.: Educational Testing Service, 1978.

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APPENDIX

Prompt for Expressive Writing (Grades 4, 6)

Directions: You are writing to a pen-pal in a nearby school who is the same age as you. Introduce yourself. Tell something about what you look like. Tell about the work you do at home and at school. Tell about the things you do for fun and the kind of people you like.

Prompt for Explanatory Writing (Grades 4, 6)

Directions: You have met a man from outer space who has landed on earth near your school playground. He can understand English, but he does not know anything about school here on earth. Describe your school for him. Tell him about your school building. Tell how the school building looks on the outside and the inside. Tell him about your teacher and your classmates.

Prompt for Persuasive Writing (Grades 4, 6)

Directions: The principal in your school has said that your class has permission to take a field trip in the spring. The principal has asked you boys and girls to make suggestions about where to go on the trip. Select a place that your class would like to visit for a day. Write a note to the principal. Give the name of the place you have picked. Tell the reasons you think it is a good place for a field trip.

	High	Middle	Low	Subscore
I. CONTENT				
A. Ideas	3	2	1	_____
B. Organization	3	2	1	_____
II. MECHANICS				
A. Syntax	3	2	1	_____
B. Usage/word choice	3	2	1	_____
C. Punctuation/capitalization	3	2	1	_____
D. Spelling	3	2	1	_____
			Total score	_____

Summary Sheet for Analytic Scoring

Holistic Scoring Guide, Spaceman

Score of 4

Writer does all or most of the following:

1. Attempts to describe accurately school building—outside and inside. Includes many exact details of size, color, and number of classrooms. Discusses teachers and students with reference to school life.
2. Groups details into some clear plan of organization.
3. Shows superior command of language structure and vocabulary.
4. Shows superior grasp of spelling and mechanics for this purpose. Reader proceeds rapidly. (Is not held up by inability to decipher handwriting, spelling, and sentence endings.)

Score of 3

Writer does all or most of the following:

1. Attempts to describe accurately school building—outside and inside. Includes fewer exact details of size, color, and number of classrooms. Discusses teachers and students with reference to school life. May omit some sections of prompt.
2. Groups details into some clear plan or organization.
3. Shows adequate command of language structure and vocabulary.
4. Shows adequate working grasp of spelling and mechanics for this purpose. Reader proceeds rapidly. Misspelling is likely only with unfamiliar words.

Score of 2

Writer does all or most of the following:

1. Includes some details to describe school building—outside and inside—but details are often confusing. Uses general terms rather than specific details. Omits many sections of prompt. May digress.
2. Shows minimal organization. May list teachers and friends with little comment.
3. Shows some command of language structure and vocabulary, but sentences are sometimes unclear, and meaning is sometimes not immediately apparent to reader.
4. Shows sufficient grasp of spelling and mechanics for communication. Reader may be held up by confusing sentences or sentence parts. Many misspellings of familiar as well as unfamiliar words.

Score of 1

Writer does all or most of the following:

1. Tends to confuse reader. Lacks relevant detail. May include irrelevant detail.
2. Lacks focus and organization.
3. Lacks command of language structure and vocabulary to convey meaning.
4. Lacks sufficient grasp of spelling and mechanics for adequate communication. Reader cannot understand because of confusing syntax and misspellings.

Analytic Scoring Guide, Spaceman

Subscore area	High (3)	Middle (2)	Low (1)
Content			
A. Ideas	Includes description of building and school room (perhaps playground, cafeteria, etc.). Gives many exact, descriptive details; reader can visualize the school (e.g., size, color, and number of classrooms). May refer to purpose of school or relation of teachers and students to school.	Includes fewer and less precise details of size, color, and number of rooms, etc. Some important details. May discuss teachers and other students in relation to school. Less well developed picture of school.	Does not give a clear, complete picture of any aspect of school. Description is confusing.
B. Organization	The composition is organized so that the reader can follow the description easily (e.g., outside-to-inside). Sentences logically follow each other.	Less clear cut organization. May skip around in description of physical area. Sentences may not always logically follow. Some irrelevant sentences.	No visible organization scheme. Does not flow smoothly. Many irrelevant sentences.
Mechanics			
A. Syntax	Sentences are clear with occasional run-ons and few, if any, fragments.	Sentences are basically clear. Requires occasional rereading of a sentence. Some run-ons and/or fragments.	Reader has difficulty deciphering meaning of sentences. Many run-ons and/or fragments. Omits words or sentence parts.
B. Usage/word choice	Generally uses standard English (subject-verb agreement; case and reference of pronouns). Doesn't depend on slang.	Some errors in standard English (subject-verb agreement; case and reference of pronouns). May use slang, but not dependent on it.	Does not use standard English (many errors in subject-verb agreement; case and reference of pronouns).
C. Punctuation/ capitalization	Begins and ends sentences correctly, but they include some run-ons. Capitalizes proper nouns and "I." Uses commas in a series.	May occasionally fail to capitalize some proper nouns and "I"; may occasionally begin or end sentence incorrectly.	Lacks sure knowledge of what to capitalize and punctuate.
D. Spelling	Spells commonly used words correctly most of the time. When words are misspelled, they closely approximate correct spelling.	May misspell (more frequently) common words as well as "demons." Some phonetic spelling.	Many misspellings. Often doesn't approximate correct spelling of word.

Holistic Scoring Guide - "Field Trip"

(from SAEM)

Score of 4

Writer does all or most of the following:

1. Makes a decision about where to go. (Can give two places if support is shown for both.) Is likely to imply or state educational as well as recreational values of trip. May add details for planning trip. May make case for other students as well as for self.
2. Organizes details in some clear fashion to convince reader. Free of irrelevant details. Clear, fully developed paragraphs.
3. Shows superior command of language structure and vocabulary.
4. Shows superior grasp of spelling and mechanics. Reader proceeds rapidly. (Is not held up by inability to decipher handwriting, spelling, sentence breaks and endings.)

Score of 3

Writer does all or most of the following:

1. Makes a decision about where to go. Is likely to imply educational as well as recreational values of trip. May add details for planning trip. Less developed. Fewer details. May have some beginning of personal memories.
2. Organizes details, although reasons for trip not as fully developed. Linkage between sentences less strong.
3. Shows adequate command of language structure and vocabulary.
4. Shows adequate working grasp of spelling and mechanics. Reader proceeds rapidly. Only unfamiliar words are misspelled.

Score of 2

Writer does all or most of the following:

1. Makes a decision about where to go. Justification is scanty or likely to be lost in personal reminiscence. Less awareness of other children. Personal memories and satisfactions likely to dominate composition.
2. Shows minimal organization. Few real linkages between sentences. Little development. Likely to be short.
3. Shows some command of language structure and vocabulary, but sentences are sometimes unclear, and meaning is sometimes not immediately apparent to reader.
4. Shows sufficient grasp of spelling and mechanics for communication. Reader may be held up by confusing sentences or sentence parts. Many misspellings of familiar as well as unfamiliar words.

Score of 1

Writer does all or most of the following:

1. Makes no decision or makes a decision but makes no case. For example, "It would be fun." May get lost in personal reminiscence.
2. Shows no apparent organization. Lacks supporting detail. Mixes in irrelevant detail.
3. Lacks command of language structure and vocabulary to convey meaning.
4. Lacks sufficient grasp of spelling and mechanics for adequate communication. Reader cannot understand because of confusing syntax and misspellings.

Analytic Scoring Guide - "Field Trip"

(from SAEM)

Subscore area	High (3)	Middle (2)	Low (1)
Content			
A. Ideas	Makes a decision about where to go. (Can give two places if support is shown for both.) Is likely to imply or state educational as well as recreational values of trip. May add details for planning trip. Makes the case for other students as well as for self. Makes a strong case to persuade the principal.	Makes a decision about where to go. May emphasize solely personal reasons (or stress personal more than educational reasons). Makes case for personal self alone.	Makes no decision or makes a decision but does not make a strong case for it. May get lost in personal reminiscences.
B. Organization	The details are organized in a clear fashion to convince reader - a beginning, a middle, and an end. Free of irrelevant details. Clear paragraphing.	Less clear cut organization. Fewer details to support position. May not place strongest point in prominent position. Sentences may not always follow logically from previous sentence. May have some irrelevant details.	No visible organizational scheme. Lacks supporting details. Mixes in many irrelevant details.
Mechanics			
A. Syntax	Sentences are clear and unambiguous. Occasional run-ons, and few, if any, fragments.	Sentences are basically clear. Requires occasional rereading of a sentence. Some run-ons and/or fragments.	Reader has difficulty deciphering meaning of sentences. Many run-ons and/or fragments. Omits words or sentence parts.
B. Usage/word choice	Generally uses standard English (subject-verb agreement; case and reference of pronouns). Doesn't depend on slang.	Some errors in standard English (subject-verb agreement; case and reference of pronouns). May use slang, but not heavily dependent on it.	Does not use standard English (many errors in subject-verb agreement; case and reference of pronouns).
C. Punctuation/ capitalization	Begins and ends sentences correctly, but they include some run-ons. Capitalizes proper nouns and "I." Uses commas in a series.	May occasionally fail to capitalize some proper nouns and "I"; may occasionally begin or end sentence incorrectly.	Lacks sure knowledge of what to capitalize and punctuate.
D. Spelling	Spells commonly used words correctly most of the time. When words are misspelled, they closely approximate correct spelling.	May misspell (more frequently) common words as well as "demons." Some phonetic spelling.	Many misspellings. Often doesn't approximate correct spelling of word.